

The
WHITE PINE
SERIES OF
Architectural Monographs
Volume II *Number 3*

Early HOVSES *of the*
CONNECTICVT RIVER VALLEY

With Introductory Text by
Richard B Derby

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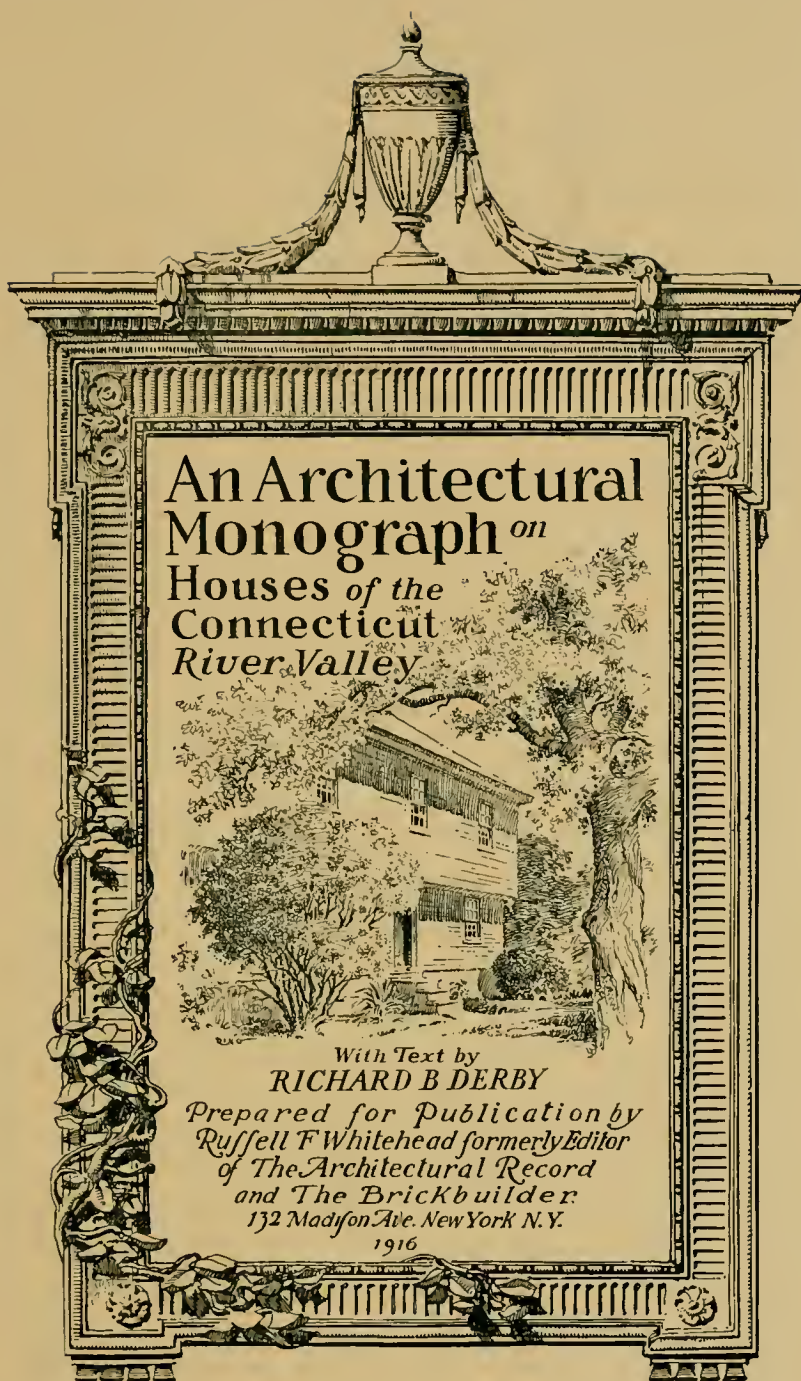
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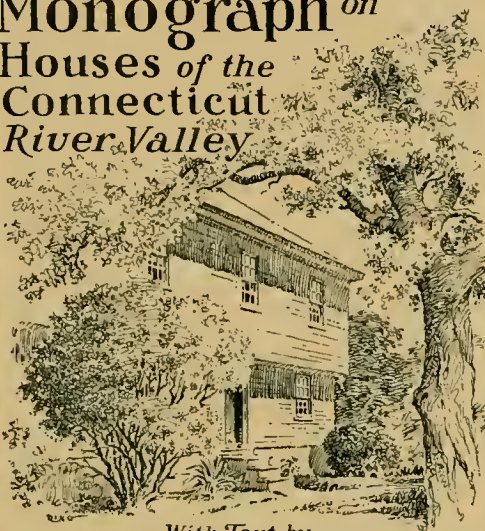
Vol. 2

No. 3

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An Architectural
Monograph *on*
Houses of the
Connecticut
River Valley



With Text by
RICHARD B DERBY
Prepared for Publication by
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of The Architectural Record
and The Brickbuilder
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Photograph by H. O. Warner

THE COLTON HOUSE, LONGMEADOW, MASSACHUSETTS.
Detail of Entrance Doorway.

The WHITE PINE SERIES of ARCHITECTURAL MONOGRAPHS

A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION SUGGESTING THE
ARCHITECTURAL USES OF WHITE PINE AND ITS
AVAILABILITY TODAY AS A STRUCTURAL WOOD

Vol. II

JUNE, 1916

No. 3

EARLY HOUSES OF THE CONNECTICUT VALLEY

By RICHARD B. DERBY

Mr. Derby, of the firm of Derby & Robinson, Architects, of Boston, has designed many quaint and artistic examples of dwellings which adhere strongly to precedent and closely follow our early Colonial traditions. It is believed that these charming structures will find a permanent place in the evolutionary history of our domestic work and will do much toward bringing the ideals of the profession to a greater height.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JULIAN BUCKLY AND OTHERS

PREFACE

THE Connecticut Valley was first settled by exiles from Massachusetts in 1636. The original settlements in Springfield and other communities in Massachusetts and also in the so-called "river towns" of Connecticut, Hartford, Windsor and Wethersfield, broke up from time to time, and the seceders formed new settlements along the river valley at other points. At the same time the first settled towns were augmented by the arrival of new members from the coast. Within a comparatively short time territory was intermittently occupied between, say, Northampton and Wethersfield, over a distance of one hundred miles or so. Their first dwellings were merely cellars, which, however, speedily gave place to a kind of house which became typical of the so-called first period work. The plan of these houses was little more than two rooms on either side of the chimney, in front of which was the stair leading out of the hall into which the front door opened. The second story was the same as the first, although in some cases the rooms were slightly larger by reason of an overhang. This early plan was altered by the addition of a shed on the rear, making the typical plan of the second period, and this again was altered to make the third period by raising the addition a full two stories, and by the consequent change in roofing to the gambrel.

Thence we have shift to the two end chimneys, altering their positions and occupying such a place with regard to the rooms that the resultant plan resembles two of the earlier plans put side by side, with a hallway running between them. These types overlapped each other in various ways, but eventually gave place as essential types to the Greek influence, which began to be felt, perhaps, around 1800.

The Connecticut Valley work had some few

characteristics of its own, due to local material or the importation direct from England of craftsmen working in slightly differing methods. The chimneys, for instance, were largely built of stone, since stone was plentiful and brick, of course, was not. The brick ovens which we find inserted in the chimneys were not, as a rule, contemporary with them. The summer beams ran from chimney to end wall, as in the houses of the Plymouth colony, instead of parallel with the chimney girt, as in the early houses of other communities. The use under the overhang of both drop and bracket is a Connecticut characteristic, as are also the brackets under the gable, though the use of brackets under the verge board is not uncommon elsewhere. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of this Connecticut Valley work in the matter of design is to be found in the entrance treatment of the houses. The doors themselves were double doors, paneled in a manner not elsewhere to be found. One writer refers the paneling to Jacobean precedent. The frames around these also were markedly distinctive. Three types stand out, all of which are broad, of course, by reason of the wide door openings: the frames which have the flat entablatures, those with simple pediments, and those with broken pediment frames, which are perhaps more typical than the others. On the detail of all of these, particularly the latter, much careful workmanship is lavished. It varies from a kind which follows precedent to that which is unique, much of the latter being pure inspiration on the owner's or builder's part. It would seem as if the builders of the earlier houses found much entertainment in exercising their ingenuity upon the detail of their entrances, without, however, departing from their general type.



THE WHITMAN HOUSE, FARMINGTON, CONNECTICUT.

Noteworthy as an example of the overhang construction with original drops and stone chimney.



THE WILLIAMS HOUSE, EAST HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT.

Characteristic of Connecticut third period work.

MAN LOVES any material that he has worked upon in proportion to its resistance to his efforts of bending it to his will,—assuming that he has not attempted the impossible or the absurd with reference to the task at hand. This is why the hand-hewn timber of our old houses is better than the two by four sawed stud or the six by eight post. I can very well believe that the first settlers in Connecticut took their timbers for their houses with them, as they are said to have done. They had wrought upon them with their own hands, and had a certain affection for them on this account, and what is equally important, the timbers had an affection for the men who had worked them. The frames of our present houses are a pretty good example of efficiency in the economic and modern sense. Its loads have been carefully appraised and distributed proportionately over the members which it supports, so that the strain and stress on each of these is just precisely what each one will bear, and never more or less. This may be all right, as no doubt it is from the scientific or the economic point of view, but it represents for me a very low order of efficiency.

I look at the ten by twelve corner posts in the summer kitchen of my great-grandfather's old home, and I wonder whether he knew that four by six posts would have done the work of these. Perhaps he did, and perhaps he did not, and perhaps he did not care whether it would have done the work or not; but I feel sure that he would never have had the satisfaction out of our smaller post that he must have experienced from the ten by twelve. My great-grandfather had the reputation in his district of being able to square the butt of a log more perfectly than any one else around, and he left a better stump in his wood lot than his neighbors did. I am sure, therefore, that he applied himself with great care to the corner posts, beams and rafters of his own home, that he had a defensible pride in the result of his handiwork, and that he never could have had this pride in any four by six. The affection which he had for his timbers was returned by them, and is being returned to-day. I get back some of it always when I look at the smoky corner posts, or when I lie on the bed in the unfinished attic and let my eyes wander over the hand-hewn rafters.

Connecticut settlers of 1636 forged their way westward from Massachusetts through uncharted forests. They cut their own paths, except, perhaps, for short distances, where they found an Indian trail making in their direction. Besides their axes they must have carried arms; for, though the Indians were politically friendly,

they were hardly to be trusted in every case. They must have carried, too, some provisions and their camping outfits, for they did not know that they would always have luck in finding food, and they were quite uncertain in what places or at what times they would pitch their tents. It is hardly to be believed, therefore, that they carried timber along with the other things on their backs, or that they added this to the burdens of their horses. It is not incredible, however, that, the Connecticut Valley once reached, they had their timbers brought in the vessels which made the first long voyage around the cape and up the river to the place of their abode. They were engaged primarily in clearing and planting, and, no doubt, their energies were fully occupied with these exertions.

The first houses, as we know, were merely cellars dug in the side of a hill, the walls lined with stone or logs; the roofs simply lean-tos brushed or thatched. These crude shelters gave place to better habitations in comparatively short time. The very early dwellings were likely built of White Pine, and in certain instances of oak, squared and bored and ready to be raised and pinned together.

Fetching timber from Massachusetts could hardly have continued long. It was too much like bringing coals to Newcastle. The timber was abundant, and the craftsmen instinct must have cried aloud to exercise itself.

We are not acquainted with the aspect of the forest which these settlers looked out upon, and we do not know precisely the feelings which the native trees engendered under the conditions which obtained; but some of us are not so young but that we have seen native forests, and the impression these have made upon us (though of a later time and under widely changed conditions) is not perhaps so very different from that made on the earliest inhabitants of Western Massachusetts and Connecticut. I myself remember very well the primeval forests of the Alleghany Mountains in Pennsylvania. I remember when I first rode over them on a tote-team, and later tramped my way, with pack on back, beneath the pine and hemlock. The lowest branches of these trees were far above me. I should hardly dare to guess how far, but I can recollect distinctly that the rhododendrons which flourished in the dusk below them interlaced their lowest branches several times my height above my head, and the blossoms of the topmost branches must have been thirty or more feet in height. The butts of the trees themselves were huge, and the whole effect or feeling (one does not observe the forest) for me was the same that I get from

looking at a lofty mountain. I do not wish to try to match my strength against a mountain, and I did not (as I now remember) wish to build myself a cabin of these trees.

This was not the feeling, however, of the men who worked among them. These trees, or the making of them into timber, was their life. They were not depressed but rather tempted and exhilarated by the size and number of them; it was their pride, like my great-grandfather's, to square a butt with axes or to notch one so exactly that the tree would fall precisely where they meant it should. They saw

only the tree that could be felled and subdivided, barked and piled on skidways and later take its booming way for miles along the frosty slide to

water, whence it could be splashed or floated to the saw-mills. These lumbermen had both strength and genius for this work, and no doubt the earlier settlers had it also. In addition, they had an instinct for building their homes.

The earliest houses which they built have not come down to us. The Indians, who were friendly for the first years, took the war-path, and the life of the settlers for perhaps a hundred years included a constant warfare for defense among its other duties. As the whites increased in number they were more able to protect themselves. The first settlements were

frequently destroyed. Springfield was burned in 1675 and Deerfield met the same fate twice, — smaller places even more frequently. Men,



THE WAIT HOUSE, SOUTH LYME, MASSACHUSETTS.

Unsymmetrical placing of the windows.



OLD HOUSE AT FARMINGTON, CONNECTICUT.

Gambrel of the third period with plan of the first period.

women and children were butchered by scores and many were carried into captivity. One writer* has said: "There is hardly a square acre and certainly not a square mile of the Connecticut Valley that has not been tracked by the flying feet of fear, resounded with the groan of the dying, drunk the blood of the dead or served as the scene of toils made doubly toilsome by an apprehension of danger that never slept." In spite of this the towns grew slowly, for the inhabitants—such of them as were left—came back and rebuilt their homes.

Most of these houses we find were doubtless built not earlier than 1650, and I myself feel reasonably sure only of work as many as ten years later. This, of course, was modeled

from the earliest type of house and has the hand-hewn timbers put together according to the logic and efficiency of this early time. The

examples of the first period are to be found mostly in Connecticut, and even here in the southern part of the valley. After these, as we go north, we find examples of the two succeeding periods, and in the northern part of the Connecticut Valley we find examples of the Greek influence. This does not mean that the late work is found, but rather that the earlier work is not found (or at least that I have not found it) in the northern part. Here in the val-

ley, as elsewhere in the country, we find the earlier builders the craftsmen of their own

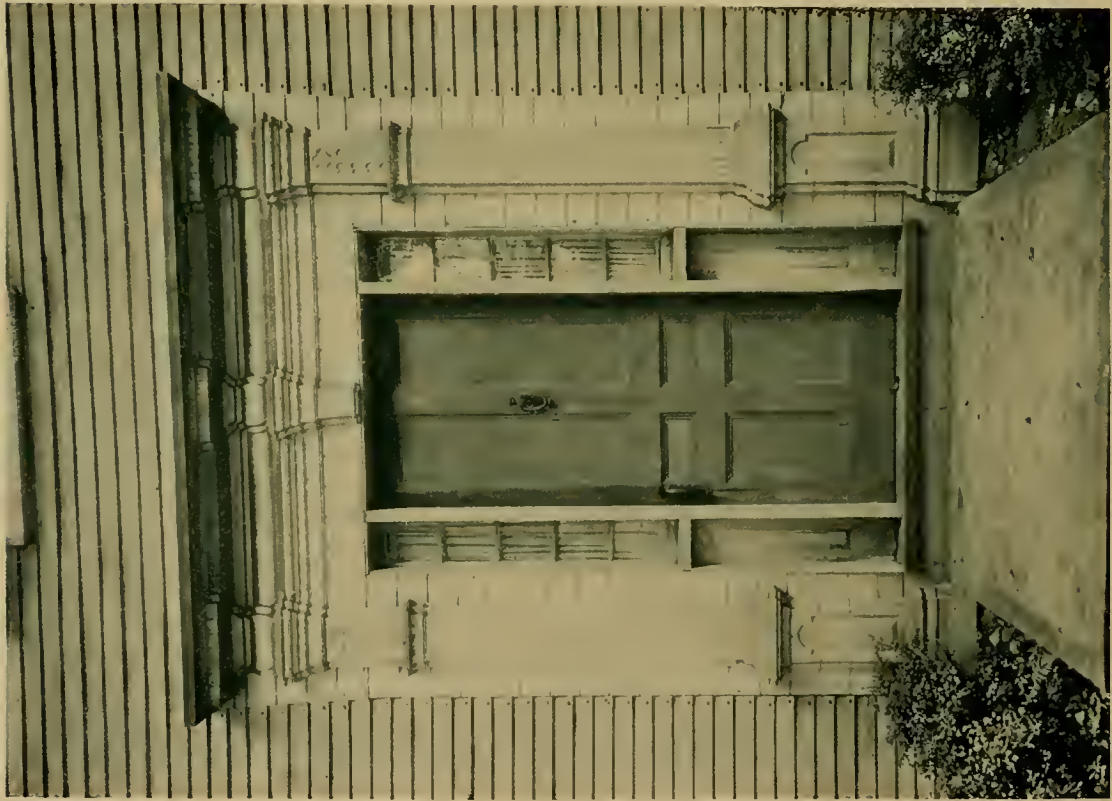
* Holland, "History of Western Massachusetts."



THE THOMAS LEE HOUSE, EAST LYME, MASSACHUSETTS.
Original part of house built about 1660.



THE DEMING HOUSE, WETHERSFIELD, CONNECTICUT.
Center doorway with one window on either side.



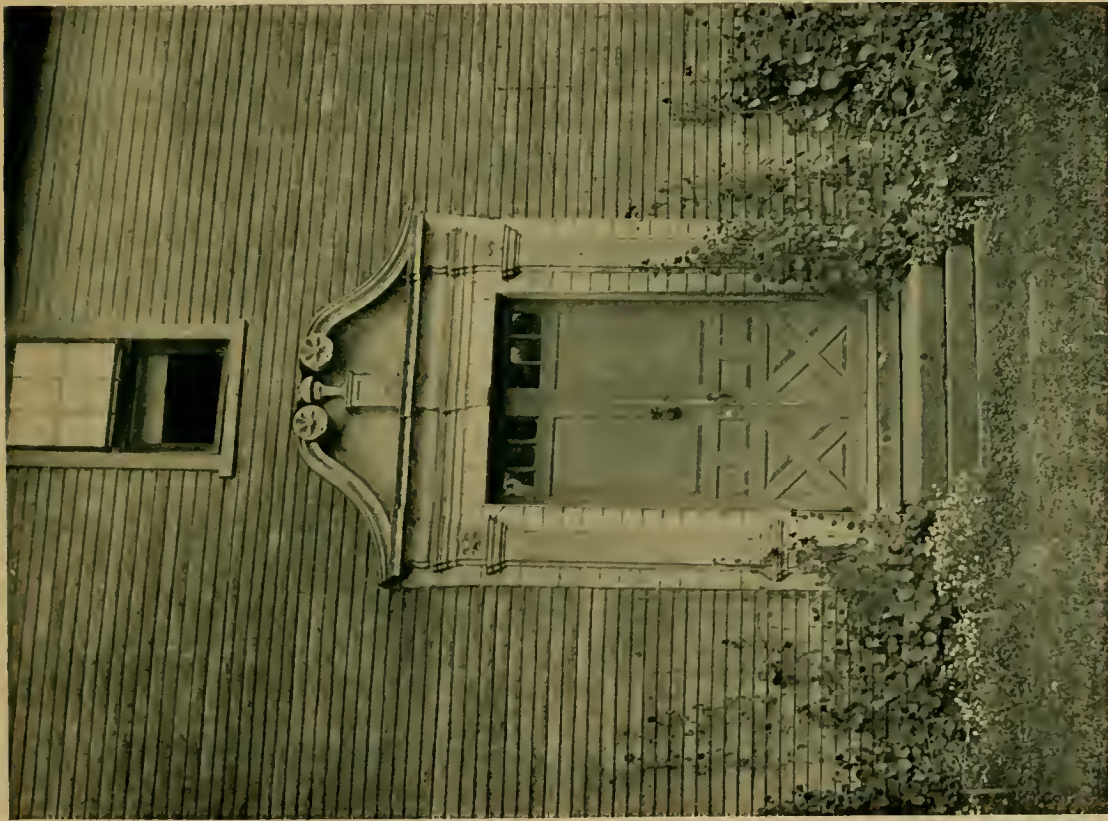
Frame with flat entablature.



Frame with simple pediment.

TWO OF THE TYPES OF CONNECTICUT VALLEY DOORWAYS.

Literal copies in wood of Georgian stone doorways made before Colonial woodworkers had learned the more graceful and more delicate possibilities of wood as a building material, yet early enough to show still a trace of Gothic feeling in the lower panels.



Detail of Entrance.

THE WILLIAMS HOUSE, DEERFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS.
A doorway with broken pediment which claims to have been built in 1750, the same year as the house, but is probably several decades later.



Entrance Porch.

HOUSE AT GLASTONBURY, CONNECTICUT.
Much of the charm of this porch may be the charm of age, but it is finely proportioned and of refined detail.

houses, and here as elsewhere we find the craftsmen limited to the work of the building craft. In proportion as time advanced and the settlements increased in size, people pursued more and more strictly their own business, and more and more called in outsiders, who were builders only, to construct their houses for them. This meant that the builders, in fulfilling all their obligations, economized their time by milling their logs instead of squaring them by hand. They used nails instead of wooden pins and used manufactured nails instead of hand-wrought ones. In this way they got more and more out of touch with the materials in which and with which they worked, and so, of course, they had less affection for them. The good old beams were first cased and then entirely concealed behind plaster, being reduced in size to meet merely structural needs. Interest became cen-

tered in the things that were apparent outside as well as inside the house, and this tendency continued until we to-day are giving our interest and attention to the detail which superficially appears.

It would be interesting to do an old house as the old men would have done it, and it is likely that most architects would welcome a chance to do this if it offered. Big White Pine timber grows abundantly to-day, though no longer in the East and at our very doors, but the facilities of transportation may almost do away with the handicap of this condition. Let some big lumberman offer us his large timbers and see whether this may not result in a reversion in some degree to older architectural types. These types, when added to our present ones, would furnish a broader basis of tradition on which to build our future native work.



THE ELLSWORTH HOUSE, WINDSOR, CONNECTICUT.

Two-story end treatment is interesting. Classic proportions for columns have been disregarded, resulting in a delicacy which is peculiarly appropriate to wood.



THE WHEELER HOUSE, ORFORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE.

It is believed this house was done by Bulfinch.

Photograph by Julian Purkly



HOUSE AT HILLSTEAD, FARMINGTON, CONNECTICUT.

Excellent but rather sophisticated example of type of house which embraces elements of design from several periods, all probably earlier than itself.



HOUSE OF GOVERNOR RICHARD GRISWOLD, BLACKHALL, CONNECTICUT. Built 1800.
An unusual and interesting composition in spite of the regrettable bay.



THE HORATIO HOYT HOUSE, DEERFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
Excellent example of Connecticut Valley variety of a type of house common to New England.



THE FRARY HOUSE, DEERFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS.
North portion built in 1683. An L variety of the above Hoyt type of house.



THE FRARY HOUSE, DEERFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS.
Detail of Side Entrance Doorway.

Excellent in proportion and in well-executed detail.

THE WHITE PINE OF THE NEW ENGLAND STATES, NEW YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, MINNESOTA, WISCONSIN, MICHIGAN, AND IDAHO ITS COMPARATIVE QUALITIES

By ALLISON W. LAIRD

General Manager, Pottlatch Lumber Company, Pottlatch, Idaho

WITH INTERPOLATED STATEMENT BY HOWARD F. WEISS,
DIRECTOR UNITED STATES FOREST PRODUCTS LABORATORY

THE White Pine used in building our first New England homes was grown in the New England States, New York and Pennsylvania. Since then the trend of White Pine production has gradually been westward, and to-day the major portion of the White Pine distributed in the markets of the United States, and also exported, comes from Northern Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, and the far western district of Northern Idaho. The habitat of the true White Pine seems to have been confined to three districts in the United States and to a small portion of Eastern Canada, and while widely separated and distinctly different in topographical features, and in climatic and soil conditions, yet each has produced in almost identical quality that species of tree known as "White Pine."

Numerous species of Pine are now being marketed under the name of "White Pine," these being variously called "California White Pine," "Oregon White Pine," "Mexican White Pine," etc., but the White Pine of the Eastern States, of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, and of Idaho, is the only true White Pine other than the Canadian product to-day being marketed under that name.

That the comparative qualities of White Pine from the widely separated territories of the New England States, New York, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Idaho, may be presented in an authoritative and unprejudiced way, herewith is appended a statement by Mr. Howard F. Weiss, Director United States Forest Products Laboratory,—Mr. Weiss being the chief technical expert on all forest products for the United States Government, and an acknowledged national authority on all subjects pertaining to wood:

"The White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) grown years ago in the New England States and in Pennsylvania analyzes botanically and in other particulars the same as the White Pine to-day being cut in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, other than the slight differences that result from the changed climatic and soil conditions in the widely separated territories in which it is grown. Also does Idaho White Pine, though botanically called *Pinus monticola*, analyze almost

identically like the White Pine of the New England States, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, the climatic and soil conditions of Idaho here again in some slight degree differentiating it from the White Pine of the East and of the Middle West. In other words, for practical use the White Pine of the New England States, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Idaho is so similar that it can be used interchangeably with very satisfactory results."

The White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) of the New England States, New York and Pennsylvania, and of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, is alike characterized by its extreme softness, ease of working, strength, durability, its ability to stay in place after once being fitted, its freedom from pitch or objectionable acids, and its consequent remarkable qualities as a structural wood, especially for outside uses.

The White Pine formerly cut in the East and in the North Central States was of large growth and of exceptional quality,—of soft, almost corklike texture,—and there is still remaining a large footage of this same high quality of timber in Northern Minnesota and Wisconsin. White Pine lumbering operations are to-day being carried on in the virgin forests the same as they were generations ago, and not, as has sometimes been supposed, from so-called second growth or cut-over lands. While the White Pine produced to-day in Northern Minnesota and Wisconsin, and the White Pine grown years ago in New England, is or was all cut from virgin forests, it must not be supposed that all White Pine from any one locality, either in the East or Middle West, is of equal quality. The choicest of old growth White Pine does not grow alone in, nor is it identified with, any one locality, the White Pine of highest quality and the coarser types usually growing together, oftentimes intermixed, in the same general territory. Some territories naturally produce a larger and some a lesser percentage of the choicer qualities, but no one territory produces it all; and while all White Pine producing territories are alike contributors, yet all differ in the relative percentage each is able to furnish in the higher and the lower grades.

Idaho White Pine (*Pinus monticola*) is a true White Pine, differing only slightly in certain characteristics from the White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) of the New England States, New York, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. In fact, all botanists are not agreed that there is a botanical difference.

Idaho White Pine is hardy and grows in thin and rocky soil in mountainous districts, or in rich volcanic ash, the growth being dense and intermingled with Fir and Tamarack. The rain- and snow-fall are heavy and conditions have produced an exceptionally tall, round tree, with little taper and few and strong limbs. The large old growth White Pine in this district furnishes the same quality of soft, cork White Pine as was the distinguishing trait of the Eastern White Pine. The second or younger growth White Pine furnishes what is known under the grading rules as so-called "White Pine Common" lumber, this younger growth White Pine producing remarkably straight-grained, sound and small-knotted lumber, showing evenness of grain close up to the knot defect, and the same general appearance throughout the entire length of the board. The freedom of the trees from large limbs renders the lumber comparatively free from large, coarse knots, those which do appear being of the pin-knot variety.

It seems unnecessary to dwell on the merits of Clear White Pine, but so-called White Pine "Common" lumber, or in other words White Pine that carries knots, should be painstakingly described for the reason that if this particular character of lumber was thoroughly understood its practical uses would be greatly broadened. In house construction, for exterior finish, in porches, cornices, siding, and other outside trim, or for any use where the wood is to be covered with paint, the better grades of this so-called "White Pine Common Lumber" are—after shellacking its small, sound knots—almost the equal in actual service of Clear White Pine lumber. Unfortunately White Pine trees do not produce "Clear" lumber wholly, and a large part of the tree carries defects, the most prevalent being knots. Knots are not the result of a diseased or defective tree, but are really the limbs and branches of the tree. An open

forest in its freedom of growth produces large-limbed trees and consequently large-knotted lumber. In denser, more heavily shaded forests the trees become self-pruning, the small limbs growing stuntedly and dropping off at an early period in the tree's life, this in result producing small-knotted grades of lumber.

In general, the marked characteristics of all White Pine, whether from the Eastern States, the Middle West, or from Idaho, are softness of texture, evenness of fiber, closeness of grain, absence of unruly cross-grain, ability to stand extremes of weather, hot or cold, wet or dry, without deterioration or rot, and an absence of any tendency to open at the joints, to warp or to creep, after once being put into place. It shrinks less than any other structural wood, is very light, and while it does not possess in pieces of equal dimension the strength of some of the harder, heavier woods, weight for weight it has no equal. For pattern work or the most delicate wood-carving it is the first choice of all wood-workers.

White Pine in its freedom from resin or pitch or from objectionable acids and oils takes paint or enamel finish perfectly. It absorbs and grips the paint, but does this economically, and holds its coat of paint longer and more perfectly than any other wood, hard or soft.

Commercially speaking, the New England States, New York, and Pennsylvania formerly furnished, and in later years Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota have furnished the great and seemingly exhaustless supply of White Pine lumber up to a comparatively recent date. About ten years ago Idaho White Pine began to appear in the markets and has since competed in friendly rivalry. A close analysis of the comparative qualities of the White Pine from the East, Middle West, and from Idaho results in finding only those slight differences which are due to changed climatic and soil conditions in the widely separated territories. For all practical purposes, however, the White Pine grown in any of these three White Pine producing territories is identical, and can be used from any one district, or interchangeably if desired, by the most discriminating and exacting of architects or builders, with an absolute assurance of satisfactory results.

The seventh monograph will be devoted to the publication of the Prize and Mention designs in the White Pine Architectural Competition, with the report of the Jury of Award.

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